

2008 ANNUAL REPORT TO THE GOVERNOR MASSACHUSETTS COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND REHABILITATION COUNCIL

We, the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind Rehabilitation Council, are pleased to submit this report to the Honorable Deval Patrick, Governor, Commonwealth of Massachusetts, for federal fiscal year 2008, as required by the Rehabilitation Act, as amended.

INTRODUCTION

The Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB) is a state agency established to provide legally blind people with the training and support needed to live independent and productive lives within the economic, social, and civic spheres of the Commonwealth. Approximately 35,000 residents are legally blind. The MCB Rehabilitation Council (RC) is a citizen body composed of community and business leaders who advise MCB on the conduct of its mission relative to the rehabilitation of persons who are legally blind.

MEMBERSHIP

VOTING MEMBERS

Tom Boudrow, Peabody

Representative, Business, Industry and Labor, not
legally blind

Tamika Correia, Taunton

Representative, State Workforce Investment Board,
not legally blind

David D'Arcangelo, Malden

Representative, Business, Industry and Labor, legally
blind

Lorna DesRoses, Dorchester

Minority Communities, legally blind

Lisa DiBonaventura, Newton

Representative, a Person who is Blind, has Multiple
Disabilities, and is Unable to Represent Himself, not
legally blind

Gloria Evans, Winthrop

Region III, legally blind

Priscilla Ferris, Somerset

Region V, legally blind

Robin Foley, Worcester

Representative, Parent Training and Information
Centers, not legally blind

Bob Hachey, Waltham

Region IV, legally blind

Marie Hennessy, Malden

Representative, Bay State Council of the Blind (ACB),
legally blind

Jennifer James, Boston

Representative, State Workforce Investment Board,
not legally blind

Betty King, Boston

Representative, Statewide Independent Living
Council, not legally blind

Mary Ann Lareau, Waltham

Region IV, legally blind

Madeline Levine, Swampscott

Representative, Massachusetts Department of
Education (special education), not legally blind

Barbara Lybarger, Quincy

Representative, Client Assistance Program
Massachusetts Office on Disability (MOD), not legally
blind

Oswald Mondejar, Brookline
Representative, Business, Industry and Labor, not
legally blind

Margaret O'Donnell, Springfield
Region I, legally blind

Betsy Pillsbury, Somerville
Representative, Business, Industry and Labor, not
legally blind

Amy Ruell, Hingham
Visually Impaired and Blind User Group, legally blind

Paul Saner, Brookline
Representative, Community Rehabilitation
Program Service Providers, legally blind

Judy Savageau, Worcester
Region II, not legally blind

Kevin Seaver, Boston
Representative, National Federation of the Blind of
Massachusetts (NFB), legally blind

Phyllis Sneirson, Brookline
Representative, Parent Training and Information
Centers, not legally blind

Rafael Toro, Westfield
Region I, legally blind

Petri Turner, Brockton

Representative, Business, Industry and Labor, not
legally blind

Gayle Yarnall, Amesbury

Representative, Business, Industry and Labor, legally
blind

Phil Zukas, Hyde Park

Region VI, legally blind

NON-VOTING MEMBERS

Janet L. LaBreck, Boston

Commissioner, Massachusetts Commission for the
Blind

Alan White, Boston

Representative, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors
Supervisor, Region VI, Massachusetts Commission
for the Blind

SUPPORTING STAFF AND OTHER INTERESTED PARTIES

Jan Doremus, Boston
RC Staff Assistant
Massachusetts Commission for the Blind

Patricia Hart, Boston
RC Consultant
Program Manager, Policy Development
Massachusetts Commission for the Blind

Lynn Paulson, Boston
Deputy Commissioner for Services
Massachusetts Commission for the Blind

Meg Robertson, Boston
Director, Orientation and Mobility
Massachusetts Commission for the Blind

Brian Charlson, Watertown
--, legally blind

Brendan Doherty, Springfield
Region I on MCB Central Advisory Council, legally
blind

Denise Doktor, Newton
--, not legally blind

George McDermott, Worcester
Region II on MCB Central Advisory Council, legally
blind

Carl Richardson, Brighton
Deaf-Blind Concerns on MCB Central Advisory
Council, legally blind

ACTIVITIES

INTERNAL

1. The RC made a few changes in how it conducts business:

-- The committee structure operates as the RC's primary means of conducting business between meetings. Current committees are: Adult Community Services Committee, chaired by Lisa DiBonaventura, who represents a person who is blind, has multiple disabilities, and is unable to represent himself on the RC; Braille Literacy Committee; Budget Committee, chaired by Paul Saner, who represents Community Rehabilitation Program Service Providers on the RC; Business, Industry, Labor and Education Committee, chaired by Gayle Yarnall, who represents Business, Industry and Labor on the RC; Documents Committee, chaired by David D'Arcangelo, who represents Business, Industry and Labor on the RC; Education and Employment Committee, chaired by Gloria Evans, who represents Region III on the RC; Electronic Access Committee, chaired by Amy Ruell, who represents the Visually Impaired and Blind User Group on the RC; Executive Committee, chaired by Kevin Seaver, Acting RC Chairperson; and Mobility and Transportation Committee, chaired by Bob Hachey, who represents Region IV on the RC.

-- The RC bylaws delineate how the RC operates.

-- In a continuing effort to focus the RC on time-sensitive issues, the RC Chairperson gathers input from RC members before submitting a short series of questions and/or topics in advance of each meeting. The Commissioner responds to them during her report to the RC.

2. In March 2008, the RC elected a new Secretary. In September 2008, the RC voted for the Vice-Chairperson to serve as Acting Chairperson. Current officers are:

Acting Chairperson: Kevin Seaver

Secretary: Judy Savageau

3. The RC has regularly scheduled quarterly meetings on Saturday from 12:15 to 2:45 P.M. A light lunch is served prior to each meeting. The RC holds Business, Industry, Labor and Education Committee meetings three times a year on a week day from 10:00 A.M. to noon. A light breakfast is served at each meeting.

4. To cover all RC business during quarterly meetings, the RC continues to try to send written reports on topics for members to read in advance. When one of those topics is on the agenda, only an oral update is presented during a meeting. To accomplish this, committee chairs are asked to submit written executive summary reports of their committee's actions to the RC Staff Assistant at least one month before each RC meeting so she can prepare them in accessible formats and send them to the RC. The agenda contains a Committee Reports section so chairs

can make oral reports on subsequent actions or when there is insufficient time to submit a written report. To ensure that committee chairs make every effort to produce written reports pre-meeting and that RC members read these reports before asking questions at RC meetings, the agenda continues to include the statement, "See Distributed X Report" whenever a report is associated with an item on the agenda. During the past year, the agenda was amended to contain a Public Comment section to give members of the general public an opportunity to address the RC. Before meetings, appropriate policies and regulations are sent to the RC in accessible formats.

The RC receives a quarterly Legislative Report relative to blindness issues that provides a brief description of each bill, whether it is a state or federal bill, its current status, and MCB's involvement with it.

5. Tom Boudrow joined the RC as a representative of Business, Industry and Labor. Tamika Correia succeeded Jennifer James as the representative of the State Workforce Investment Board. Robin Foley joined the RC as the representative of Parent Training and Information Centers. Bob Hachey succeeded Mary Ann Lareau as the Region IV representative. Marianne Hughes resigned from the RC; and David D'Arcangelo, who was appointed to the RC in July 2006, changed his designation on the RC to replace her as a representative of Business, Industry and Labor. Betsy Pillsbury succeeded Oswald Mondejar as a representative of Business, Industry and Labor. Phyllis Sneirson resigned from the RC. Rafael Toro succeeded

Margaret O'Donnell as the Region I representative. Petri Turner resigned from the RC. Phil Zukas succeeded Yvette McDonald as the Region VI representative.

EXTERNAL

6. The RC has developed and submitted to the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind a resource plan which continues resources for transportation, interpreters, accessible materials, and staff assistance.

7. The members of the RC have participated in both the public hearing process and the public comment process required to develop and amend the State Plan for Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and Supported Employment Services, and have also made comments and recommendations relative to the State Plan at the RC meetings. Efforts are ongoing to monitor the implementation of this Plan by the RC. We remain involved in consumer satisfaction studies and surveys.

The RC members completed a survey inquiring as to their assessment of whether MCB is meeting its own goals. The RC recommended that this survey be conducted via e-mail in the future, and that it might yield more enthusiasm from RC members in responding to these types of surveys if members had information on progress on these issues that they could more easily evaluate.

The RC officers reviewed the current goals and priorities in the State Plan and provided input on continuing or

changing them. Then the RC reviewed the draft of the required update to the State Plan for FFY 2009. At the June meeting, the agency Policy Development Manager presented an overview of the State Plan and goals for FFY 2009, and the RC membership provided input. The agency Policy Development Manager also met with the RC officers via a conference call to finalize input and recommendations from the RC. They recommended that: MCB needs to re-focus more attention on consumers with intellectual disabilities whose lead agency is the Department of Mental Retardation; MCB make available templates of statistical information on services provided by MCB, which RC members could also use in advocacy efforts on behalf of MCB consumers; and MCB conduct consumer satisfaction studies via telephone rather than mail to increase the 20% response rate to surveys, resulting in much more valid measurement of satisfaction.

The RC has continued to routinely review the consumer satisfaction studies conducted annually. The Council has provided input into the design of these studies as well as the design of the comprehensive needs assessment study. The follow-up study that MCB conducts six months after closure will be sent to the RC.

8. The following persons made presentations to the RC membership as guest speakers:

Joey Buizon, Intern Program Graduate;
and Region IV Rehabilitation Teacher, MCB

Arleen Damon, Workforce Policy and Projects Manager,
Executive Office of Labor and Workforce
Development

Bob Hachey, President, Bay State Council of the Blind
(ACB)

Patricia Hart, Program Manager,
Policy Development, MCB

Barbara Lybarger, Director, Client Assistance Program,
Massachusetts Office on Disability; Member,
Documents Committee; and Member, Electronic
Access Committee

Lynn Paulson, Deputy Commissioner for Services, MCB

Meg Robertson, Director, Orientation and Mobility, MCB

Joe Weisse, Director, Information and Outreach Services,
MCB.

The RC decided that when guests are invited to address the RC in the future, the RC should provide them with focused questions in advance to which they can respond during their presentation.

ISSUES, PROBLEMS, AND ACHIEVEMENTS

The RC has explored a number of policy areas during FY 2008. These include college training services, web site and document access, and reasonable accommodation for legally blind staff of the agency.

The RC was impressed with the material on college training that MCB sent to high school students. The RC recommended that MCB invite some current college students to talk about their college experiences at the college orientation held during the summer of 2008.

The Education and Employment Committee drafted a letter to parents of school-age children on the MCB Register about blind students getting services they need to acquire a well-rounded education, and urging parents to have an advocate, such as their child's MCB counselor, with them at IEP meetings. After the RC discussed this letter extensively, it was finalized and will be sent to parents whose children were not noted as having severe secondary disabilities. As a result of this discussion, MCB may hold forums for families to explain the purpose of an IEP and the kind of support that is available. Also MCB may conduct training to educate VR counselors and children's workers on advocating effectively at IEP meetings.

Throughout the year, the RC was updated on the state's plan to implement Open Document Format (ODF) in all state agencies to produce official documents.

Massachusetts established standards for adaptive technology and computer services and availability of computerized technology to the public and state employees. Third-party adaptive technology evaluators may approve or disapprove of products produced by contractors delivering adaptive software to the state. There is a statewide contract that any agency or municipality can use to have software that has to be developed checked for accessibility and it provides power to not pay these individuals if they do not do it correctly. Several MCB staff and RC members provided input on those standards. Because the pertinent bond was not passed, money is not available to train several thousand developers and technology staff to ensure that state web sites and other applications are designed in an accessible manner.

The RC discussed their concern that applicants for technology positions at MCB need to be screened carefully to ensure that they have the appropriate technology experience necessary for these jobs. Another concern was that if the best applicants are not hired, services to MCB consumers will be impacted. A third concern was whether the technological skills of those being interviewed are being well evaluated; the RC asked that MCB review how these new positions are being classified so that appropriate consideration is given to technological qualifications of individuals. Four RC members collaborated on writing a letter expressing the RC's concerns to the MCB Commissioner.

In March, MCB resumed holding Reasonable Accommodation meetings with legally blind staff. All staff received new computers in September 2007. Resolving problems with the JAWS screen reader is an ongoing process. On the RC's recommendation, the RC Staff Assistant has continued to call MCB's main TTY line weekly to ensure that it is functioning to enable deaf-blind people who either are not MCB consumers or do not receive services directly from MCB to reach the agency. The RC received updates on MCB's automated VR Case Management System which enables legally blind staff to track cases and complete paperwork independently. Almost all forms are available online for employees to complete. In March, MCB started a pilot project in which one case worker in each of MCB's six regions was given a laptop computer with access software, received training in its use, and began using these laptops and a VPN connection when they are in consumers' homes. As of August, this project was progressing successfully. Some legally blind staff believe that MCB does not have enough drivers to enable legally blind staff to go out on the road to visit consumers as much as sighted staff do. Staff are not penalized if they are not on the road two to three days per week due to a lack of drivers.

Throughout the year, the RC was very concerned about MCB's relocation plan of the Central Office to try to save administrative funds that might be better used. Each state agency was required to re-evaluate its office space and cost. Larger agencies were asked to share their site with other agencies. Every office of MCB will be accessible by

public transit. MCB will continue to have a Boston-based office. MCB solicited input on issues and concerns from staff. Then MCB completed questionnaires on its space needs. The RC discussed how they might impact the choice of a selection for a new site. The RC selected three members to determine how the RC might make recommendations regarding this move.

At the RC meeting in March, Barbara Lybarger, Director of the Client Assistance Program at the Massachusetts Office on Disability, conducted a training on the duties and responsibilities of Rehabilitation Councils. She discussed federal regulations that specify MCB's obligations to the RC and specify the RC's responsibilities. The RC received these regulations before this meeting. A recommendation was made for a small group of RC members to make an in-depth review of the State Plan and write a document for MCB to review. Four RC members volunteered to do so. A related issue noted was that the RC needs to have access to MCB's regulations and policies. The Commissioner will work with the agency Policy Development Manager to identify ways for the RC membership to access this material. This training concluded with a review of the tasks that the RC is charged with accomplishing. Members questioned whether the focus of the RC is too broad and should be re-focused on VR issues.

The RC discussed where RC materials and documents are stored and how to access archived materials in a centralized location. The Commissioner agreed to check with the agency Information Technology Director to

determine if they can create an electronic folder for storing these materials long-term and make them accessible via the Web. Information on how to access needed documents and archives could be disseminated to new members of the RC. Numerous members believe there is a need for an orientation for new members because of the unique nature of the RC in light of state government. The RC should implement a system to ensure that participation by RC members on various committees is understood by all, including ongoing learning being imparted to new members as needed. This may include someone looking at all archived materials and determining a manageable subset of these for new members to receive once they are approved. The RC voted that the Documents Committee compile a packet of archived materials and report back to the RC by the end of 2008.

Due to the new state administration that took office in early 2007, the RC was required to resubmit all appointments and reappointments that had previously been submitted in 2007. Subsequently, the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) requested that this paperwork be submitted again with additional information. Due to the delay in processing these recommendations for appointment and reappointment, the RC only had six members who had been appointed and could vote by the September meeting. Because only three of those appointed members attended this meeting, the RC could not elect a new Chairperson; therefore, the Vice-Chairperson has assumed all duties of the Chairperson until an election can be held. This delay in making RC

appointments and reappointments has put the RC in the situation of not having sufficient voting members to conduct business. The RC requested that Commissioner LaBreck inform the appropriate state officials about this issue, which is holding up the RC's ability to move forward with numerous key issues, and that as a result, MCB's receipt of approximately \$7 million in federal VR funding may be in jeopardy. The Commissioner submitted another copy of this paperwork to EOHHS shortly after this meeting.

During the year, the RC continued to work on getting Executive Order 374, which was written in 1994, revised so that composition requirements for the RC comply with those in the 1998 Rehabilitation Act Amendments. This is necessary to enable the RC to meet all federal requirements on composition.

The Adult Community Services Committee is concerned about services for non-traditional consumers, individuals who have multiple challenges who need more support than VR can provide but who have not previously been eligible for services through the Department of Mental Retardation or the MCB Deaf-Blind/Multi-Handicapped Unit. Several committee members joined MCB's Work Group on Non-Traditional Consumers and participated in discussions and providing input. This committee received MCB's policy on services to legally blind consumers who have hearing impairments. This committee also discussed the training needs of MCB around best practices in working with individuals with a full spectrum of disabilities

in addition to legal blindness as well as MCB working more closely with its Vendor agencies when trying to reach goals in an individual's vocational rehabilitation plan.

The Budget Committee has monitored and updated the RC on efforts to obtain additional state funding for the VR Program. Several RC members testified before the Massachusetts Legislature in support of MCB vocational rehabilitation and other programs. This committee will continue to keep the RC informed of MCB budget issues and act, when necessary, to help safeguard MCB services.

When the RC Business, Industry, Labor and Education Committee met on January 10, there was an update on MCB's unpaid work experience (internship) program for college students. The program has been running for four years. In the summer of 2007, 29 college students participated. Their work sites ranged from day care centers to law firms. MCB tries to match the students' career goals to the internship work as much as possible. Interns work without pay for six to eight weeks during the summer; MCB gives each intern a stipend of up to \$1,000 to pay for the extra expenses of commuting, lunches, etc. MCB provides any necessary support services such as mobility instruction. There is no cost to the employers beyond the staff time it takes to train and supervise the interns.

A consumer made an effective presentation about his experience as an intern several years ago. Because his

employer was impressed with his attitude and abilities, he was offered and accepted a permanent administrative support job with that employer. After successfully holding that job for some time, he accepted a job in his chosen career as a rehabilitation teacher. He believes that internship program benefits students by giving them needed work experience and allowing them to learn to network for possible future positions and to learn appropriate work behaviors, such as how to write e-mail and answer telephone calls in a professional manner.

This committee was pleased that participation in MCB's unpaid work experience program increased from 29 college students in the summer of 2007 to 40 consumers in the summer of 2008. There was an increase in participation by state agencies. Interns were placed in a variety of state agencies, nonprofits, and private offices for their internships. One intern worked in Washington, D.C. As a result of this program, four interns were hired by the Secretary of State's Office. MCB has been very appreciative of the outstanding cooperation of the business community. There is interest in expanding this internship program from a summer program into a year-round program. This would especially benefit consumers with long-term unemployment. This internship program has also been nominated for two statewide awards. In response to growing national interest in this program, MCB staff will present at several national conferences.

This committee was updated on the pilot project that MCB and the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC)

are undertaking with IBM, the Rehabilitation Services Administration, and the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation. The goal is to develop a job-matching database for persons with disabilities. This database would be more specialized than services such as monster.com or earn.com. IBM's Center for Business Innovation is working with the agencies to adapt a system that IBM uses to match its consultants worldwide. There may be great potential in the project for MCB and MRC consumers and also, if it is successful, for it to become a model to be used by rehabilitation agencies nationwide.

That update was followed by an overview of short-term training programs available from One-Stop Career Centers and "hot jobs". Only certain groups, including low-income unemployed persons and persons dislocated from jobs in specific businesses, are eligible for the short-term training programs. The training is generally for positions in high-demand sectors.

The RC was informed that MCB has a new initiative to ensure that blind children and youth acquire computer skills that are needed for success in school and employment. MCB plans to work with the Department of Education to find a way to provide accessible systems for middle school students aged 11-13 to use at home for homework and skill-building. The goal of this project is to provide support to students at home that adds to the technology these students use in school. The RC asked numerous questions regarding the specifications of the computers and who would provide training to these

students at home. MCB also plans to provide accessible systems for students aged 14-16 to use at home for homework and to prepare them to go to college and to work as interns in the future. The RC was supportive of these plans and offered valuable suggestions.

This report generated additional feedback and questions regarding computer needs of elders who are blind or visually impaired and how partnering with the Executive Office of Elder Affairs may make this a viable option for providing technology to seniors. The RC is concerned about what will happen to the baby boomer generation when they start retiring. People are both living longer and working longer. This impacts the VR Program because studies show that people have two to five careers during their working life. MCB provides computers for elders. Over the past 10 years, the Social Service staff have learned how to provide services to people in their 90s.

The Massachusetts Registry of Motor Vehicles (RMV) has not included information about blind people and the Massachusetts White Cane Law in its Massachusetts Driver's Manual and the driver's test for years. MCB will increase public awareness of white cane safety, including the purpose of a long cane and a support cane as well as white cane safety rights-of-way. The RC Mobility and Transportation Committee drafted a letter to the RMV with the following recommendations: mentioning these rights-of-way in the Driver's Manual and the driver's test; revising the Driver's Manual to more accurately reflect the Massachusetts White Cane Law and to place more

emphasis on the rights of pedestrians; including at least one question pertaining to the White Cane Law on all drivers' tests; and placing more emphasis on the White Cane Law and Pedestrian laws in the Driver Education Curriculum.

PLANS FOR FEDERAL FISCAL YEAR 2009

The RC will continue to monitor and work on some of the issues which are still ongoing from 2008, i.e., braille literacy; facilitation of transportation for people in need of transportation either to look for work or go to work; and accessibility to computer graphical user interfaces, particularly to web sites and public documents. The optimization of governmental resources to benefit the employment interests of legally blind persons and, in particular, the enhancement of vocational rehabilitation services of the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind continues to be the primary function of the RC.

The RC will work with both the Massachusetts State Government and the Federal Government to ensure that they provide material, including voting information in and out of the polling booth, to legally blind people in accessible formats.

The RC has the following goals for federal fiscal year 2009:

1. to monitor the budget and advocate to offset 100% of the shortfall that MCB will experience in this fiscal year and beyond in federal VR funding to ensure that MCB receives sufficient VR funding to provide appropriate services for consumers;
2. through interaction with pertinent MCB staff as well as the Department of Education, to endeavor to ascertain the

number and percentage of blind students currently receiving braille instruction, and what criteria is being used to make such a decision;

3. to ensure that MCB is part of IEP meetings for children;

4. to improve communication between VR counselors in MCB's regional offices and VR counselors in MCB's Deaf-Blind/Multi-Handicapped Unit to enhance services to consumers, including individuals who have reached their 14th birthday and/or have other disabilities in addition to blindness, who would otherwise not receive vital services;

5. to enhance the service delivery of MCB VR counselors to increase job development activities, job placement services, technology services, job retention, and job coaching services to all individuals, including individuals with other disabilities in addition to blindness, receiving vocational services at MCB regional offices;

6. to participate in ensuring that appropriate standards are created and implemented during the transition to the adoption of Open Document Format by state agencies;

7. to work and advocate for accessibility within the state portal system, including all documents posted on the portal;

8. to advocate for the hiring and retention of technology professionals to ensure that they have sufficient knowledge of assistive technology to provide quality

evaluation, recommendation, and training for blind children and adult consumers in the Commonwealth;

9. to work with MCB and employers to provide transportation to job sites located in industrial parks that are not near public transit routes; and

10. to work with state officials to see that more emphasis is placed on white cane safety laws for driver trainees.

The RC has appreciated the opportunity to make a difference to legally blind citizens of the Commonwealth.